

BBA artists place in federal art contest

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MANCHESTER — Danielle Laberge assumed the worst when she was called out of band class to see her art teacher, "Right now!"

"It's the 'Right now' part that scares them," said Betsy Hubner, art teacher at Burr and Burton Academy.

What Hubner couldn't wait to tell Laberge was that the shy senior from Dorset would soon be seen by her country's leaders. Or at least, if the legislators wouldn't be seeing Laberge herself, they would be seeing an artful representation.

Laberge won the first place award this year in the 25th annual congressional art competition. Her self-portrait, created with acrylic paints, will be hung in the Cannon tunnel, which connects the Cannon House office building with the Capitol building.

Phil Peisch, a spokesman for Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., said members of the House use that corridor on their way to cast votes on legislation.

Laberge isn't so sure she enjoys the spotlight, but she admitted it's good to know people like the work she and her classmates are producing.

Another Burr and Burton senior, Haley Wulfman of Sunderland, won a judges' choice award for her own self-portrait. Wulfman's water color depicts her around 6 years old, losing her first tooth while eating an ice cream cone in Nova Scotia.

Wulfman started creating art when she was about 3, while Laberge has been pursuing art since she was a sophomore. Wulfman is also considering an art major when she starts at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. Laberge chose Vassar because of its art department but thinks she'll major in biology or environmental studies.

Both were in Montpelier on May 8 to meet Jeffords for the awards ceremony. Wulfman said he was "very approachable" and said the longtime legislator would "make a great grandfather."

"It's really nice that a public figure like that cares about what we're doing as far as art goes at the school," Laberge said.

While the contest is held in a number of different states, in Vermont it was started by Sen. James Jeffords when he was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

"After 25 years of working on this competition, today was bittersweet for me: It was a real pleasure to see such an impressive collection of artwork, but difficult knowing that this is the last year I will be judging the competition. I am confident, however, that this great tradition will live on for years to come," Jeffords said.

Jeffords announced last year that he would not run for re-election when his current term expires later this year.

Hubner said Burr and Burton had participated in the contest every year in her 18-year tenure at the school. There has only been one year the students didn't win at least one award, and a Burr and Burton student also won the top prize in 1999.

Laberge and Hubner said they found themselves inspired by the creativity, encouragement and competition

among Burr and Burton students.

Wulfman said it was quite a contrast from a school she previously attended in New Jersey.

"There's so much more to work with here, so much inspiration," she said.

Laberge said winning the contest has been an inspiration for her. She went into a store in Montpelier to get the self-portrait framed and ended up buying new art supplies.

"I definitely want to paint more," she said.

The students are currently working on entries for Palette Fest. Wulfman's art is also on display at her mother's boutique, Product Workshop in Arlington.